# Uplift in Schools and the Church: Abolitionist Approaches to Free Black Education in Early National Philadelphia

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*Elise Kammerer* *

**Abstract:** *»Aufstieg durch Schulen und Kirche: Abolitionistische Ansätze für öffentliche Bildung für Afro-Amerikaner im Philadelphia nach der Revolution«.* This contribution provides a case study of how Richard Allen's Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church strove to become an autonomous provider of education to the free black community in the late 1790s and early 1800s as a way to avoid the direct influence of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS) and provide an education tailored to the needs of Philadelphia's black population. By taking education into their own hands, free blacks sought to fight inequalities by dissociating themselves from the system of inequalities represented and supported by the PAS. Though members of the PAS and leaders of the free black community shared the goal of raising the socioeconomic status of blacks and reducing poverty through education, the education provided by the AME Church aimed to provide a practical, moral education tailored to the needs of a black community struggling to obtain work in competition with recent immigrant groups, and not one – such as offered by the PAS – which provided arbitrary measures of success in a white community which disregarded black educational achievements. This case study can be placed into the broader context of blacks' ambitions of social equality with whites despite the structures of inequality – specifically regarding the lack of access to affordable, practical education – in the early republic in Philadelphia designed to keep them in a subjugated social position.

**Keywords:** Philadelphia, early republic, Pennsylvania Abolition Society, free blacks, education, Richard Allen, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church.

## 1. Introduction

As in other areas of social life, free blacks in early national Philadelphia faced structural inequalities in their ability to access an education, not only in comparison to American-born whites, but also recent immigrants such as those hailing from Germany or Ireland. In the period following the Revolutionary

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war, black Philadelphians were restricted in their access to an education for a number of reasons. First, the post-revolutionary period was one in which Philadelphians did not yet widely accept the notion of publicly funded education through taxes, as public education in the form of common schools first became available in Philadelphia in 1818; African Americans, however, were not permitted to attend until 1822, at which point they attended segregated schools built solely for their use. This meant that blacks in the early republic received an education which was funded privately. Since free blacks largely, though not always, lived life as part of a lower socioeconomic status than their white and immigrant counterparts, many families did not have the financial means to fund their own or their children's education. In fact, even when tuition was free for black students when an antislavery society funded a school, for example, many black families could still not afford to send their children to school as the child's income was an integral part of the family's financial health. With workdays being five to six days per week for twelve to fourteen hours per day (Dunbar 2008, 58), children and adults simply did not have the time to attend an educational institution, sometimes even when classes were offered in the evenings. Second, whites – even white abolitionists – generally resisted any black education in the early republic in Philadelphia that went beyond the acquisition of basic literacy skills. Though slavery was abolished in Pennsylvania in 1780, the law was one of a gradual nature. Only infants born to slave mothers on or before March 1, 1780 would be able to reach freedom in their lifetime without buying or escaping their way out of servitude. Even then, those born after this date were required to serve their mothers' masters as slaves until they reached twenty-eight years of age, essentially robbing them of freedom in their most productive years. This gradualist viewpoint was not only adopted by abolitionists in the period, but also the general population. Education was seen as a crucial element of freedom, and an educated free black populace – at a time when only few blacks had basic literacy skills – was seen as threatening to a white population. As such, even when funding was available for free black schools from whites, most schools did not offer the same caliber of education as provided to white Philadelphians.

This contribution considers how black and white abolitionists sometimes differently, and sometimes similarly, approached free black education in the early national period.[1] In the context of this article, education is understood as a

[1] In her recent book, *The Slave's Cause*, Manisha Sinha has argued that narratives of antislavery have often focused on white abolitionists or black abolitionists, and very rarely together. While Richard Newman's *Transformation of American Abolitionism* is an earlier work that includes both the work of black and white abolitionists, Sinha's work is both important and successful in that she considers black abolitionist activities both before and during the gradual wave of abolition, in addition to during the immediatist wave. This contribution takes on Sinha's idea that abolition was resistance against slavery, and that abolitionists did

wide-reaching movement to uplift poor blacks in a way which not only ensured members of this group received training in reading, writing, and basic arithmetic, but also learned how to behave morally and piously; black and white abolitionists believed that blacks' literacy, combined with their ability to work hard and live virtuously, would help to dispel wider white beliefs in blacks' racial and social inferiority. While education in the free black community took place during apprenticeships, attendance at church, in schools, or even sometimes as part of one's indenture agreement, this article specifically looks at schools, or schooling, as the branch of education in which this training took place. To achieve this, this contribution presents a case study of the different approaches whites and blacks took to schooling Philadelphia's free black community, focusing in particular on the school-based offerings of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS) and Richard Allen, founder and minister of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. While both black and white abolitionists focused on not only the literacy-based, but also moral uplift of their students, this article argues that Allen's first-hand experience of life as an African American in Philadelphia allowed him to better understand the socioeconomic realities of free blacks and thus offer schooling in a way which was more effective at educating the free black community.

At the outset of this glance into the PAS' early years in educating free blacks and Richard Allen's educational philosophy along with the happenings at Bethel, the difference between white- and black-written sources in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries needs to be addressed. Whereas the PAS, for example, kept receipts, detailed minutes, and the like, such was not practice among members of the African churches in their founding years. Although the meeting minutes of Bethel Church[2] contain information regarding the schooling offered by the Church in its later years from the mid-1800s onward, there are no direct references to the schools ran by Bethel in its earlier years that have survived. As will become clear, the emphasis on oral tradition among blacks, particularly among those with less formal training such as Richard Allen, means that much of the early years of Bethel Church, save a few addresses and minutes, were recorded either at the end of Allen's life in his autobiography *Life Experience and Gospels Labors of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen*, or by one of the later preachers of the AME Church; Daniel Payne and Benjamin Tucker Tanner, in particular, wrote detailed accounts of the church in the late nineteenth century. As such, although it is not as easy to trace the open-

not need to take part in an institutionalized group such as the PAS to be considered abolitionists. See Sinha (2016).

[2] The meeting minutes of Bethel can found on microfilm at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, along with all available editions of the Christian Recorder, the AME's newspaper. Although there is no information on the first schools Bethel was known to run, the records contain detailed information (including class lists) of the Sunday schools at Bethel from the 1840s onward.

ing and closing of schools, nor the number of pupils in attendance, there is nevertheless a trail of information left that was either relayed by Allen himself or those who knew him regarding his approach to his own education and that of others.

In a broader sense, this case study of early national Philadelphia is illuminating on a larger scale. The historiography on antislavery and education in the antebellum North has increasingly introduced transnational narratives. Even biographical analyses of certain historical actors have shifted toward a transnational perspective, introducing events outside of what would typically have been considered the primary narrative.[3] Despite this trend, a closer look toward this local moment is helpful in understanding the challenges free blacks faced in general in obtaining an education. Acknowledging that abolitionists undertook similar efforts for black education in other major Northern centers such as Boston and New York, as the home of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, some of the nation's first independent black churches, as well as an ever-increasing growth of the city's black population throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Philadelphia's residents undertook a number of different tactics to ensure the black community had access to an education which had been denied, in large part, under slavery. A number of different societies and groups were founded to support this educational mission, and by taking a detailed look at particular actors in Philadelphia, it is possible to discern how the oppressed minority group of free blacks in Philadelphia made strides in educational achievement that were adopted in other areas of the North and reverberated within American society as a whole. Although the education of free blacks is a topic which is repeatedly discussed in the literature, sometimes in more depth than at other times, the literature typically focuses on how a specific historical actor or society approached education in the free black community (for more in-depth discussions of education, see: Dunbar 2008; Nash 1988; Jerrido 1981; Lindhorst 1995; Bacon 2005; for works in which education is not a primary focus: Winch 2002; Newman 2008; Jackson 2009; and Lapansky 1980). By introducing a comparative perspective which focuses solely on education and not on education as a side mention in regard to the antislavery movement, this article highlights the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to free black education in the early national period.

[3] See, for example, how Maurice Jackson included both French and English historical narratives in his biography of Anthony Benezet (Jackson 2009), and how Julie Winch did the same in her biography on James Forten (2002).

## 2. A Demonstrable Need to Educate the Free Black Community

Historians have marked the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS) as being one of the most important abolition societies of the early national period. Originally formed in 1775 as the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, it ceased operations during the Revolutionary War, reformed in 1784, and was incorporated in 1789. Until the mid-1840s, the PAS only admitted white males as members, and not just any from that group, either. The majority of members, at least in the society's early years, were professional men, most often lawyers, but also doctors or merchants. In contrast to the push for an immediate abolition of slavery without recompense to the slaveholders which became popular in the 1830s, members of the PAS did not believe blacks to be ready for immediate freedom.[4] Thus, in contrast to post-1830s antislavery, members were often involved in representing runaway slaves in court to petition their freedom, placing free blacks from poor socioeconomic conditions in indenture agreements, or assisting them in obtaining a rudimentary education.

Richard Allen was born enslaved on February 14, 1760 to Benjamin Chew, and was sold, along with his parents and siblings, to Stokeley Sturgis in Delaware when he was still a child. He described his master as being loving, caring, and almost like a "father figure" (Allen 1880, 7) After Allen had experienced a religious rebirth in 1777 and joined the Methodist Church along with his older brother, Allen's master permitted Allen and his brother to attend religious services twice a month and bible classes every week (Newman 2008, 40-1). When Sturgis' neighbors were convinced that permitting his slaves to access a religious education was going to make them unruly and disobedient, Allen and his brother worked even harder to prove to both their master and their master's neighbors and acquaintances that religion encouraged slaves to act morally and work harder, and not the opposite (Allen 1880, 6-7).

As Allen's master grew older and frailer, Allen convinced him to have Methodist preacher John Gray come to his home to discuss the incongruence of slavery and religious ideals (Newman 2008, 66). After several months of visits, Sturgis freed Allen and his brother on the condition that they paid $2000 in

[4] Most historians associate the beginning of immediate abolition with the release of the first issue of William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* in 1831. Shortly thereafter, in 1833, for example, the American Anti-Slavery Society and its female faction, the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, were founded. These societies petitioned Congress for an immediate abolition of slavery, along with continuing the work of managing educational institutions for free blacks or promoting temperance and morality through visits to black homes. Many members, though not all, were active in the Underground Railroad, as well as being forerunners in the women's rights movement.

Continental Money for their freedom over a number of years (Allen 1880, 6-7; Newman 2008, 37). Once freed, Allen first worked cutting cords of wood and then in a brickyard, all the while giving his primary focus to religious reading and preaching (Allen 1880, 8-9). After purchasing his freedom, Allen began preaching wherever able, including in Delaware, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Specifically in Pennsylvania, he noted how dire the situation was for blacks; he saw them without adequate religious instruction or guidance:

> I soon saw a large field open in seeking and instructing my African brethren, who had been a long forgotten people and few of them attended public worship. I preached in the commons, in Southwark, Northern Liberties, and wherever I could find an opening. I frequently preached twice a day, at 5 o'clock in the morning and in the evening, and it was not uncommon for me to preach from four to five times a day. I established prayer meetings; I raised a society in 1786 of forty-two members. I saw the necessity of erecting a place of worship for the colored people (Allen 1880, 13).

Thus, early on, in the mid-1780s, Allen had already seen the need for educating other blacks and providing them with moral and religious guidance. Allen recalled that his idea, however, was met largely with resistance among the 'respectable' Philadelphia blacks. The only ones he mentions as being of the same opinion were Absalom Jones, William White, and Dorus Ginnings, the first of whom eventually became reverend of St. Thomas' African Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. As historian Richard Newman often touches upon in his biography on Allen, *Freedom's Prophet*, Richard Allen had a tendency to eventually always get what he wanted, regardless of the obstacles he faced. Newman highlights how Allen's ability to convince his master to permit a Methodist preacher to come to the home and slowly convince Sturgis of the evils of slavery to the point of manumitting Allen and his brother was not just luck. Allen knew what he was doing and would do all he could to achieve what he wanted (Newman 2008; Beck 1988). Likewise, the fact Allen's idea of a separate place for African American worship was originally unpopular did little to deter him.

Like other black Philadelphians, Allen worshiped at St. George's in Philadelphia, where he was also assigned to preach in the mornings. For almost the entire duration of Allen's membership in the congregation, blacks and whites sat together on Sundays. As the number of black worshipers began to grow, however, it was decided by the white elders in the church that the black members of the congregation should be relegated to the gallery to watch the service from above, segregated from white members of the congregation (Allen 1880, 14-5; Newman 2008, 65-6; George 1973, 54-6). In following Richard Newman's take on the incident in St. George's in 1787,[5] Allen loudly denounced

[5] There is an ongoing debate about whether this incident occurred in 1787 or not. Early Allen biographers such as Charles H. Wesley and Carol V. R. George have supported the year 1787,

the segregation of the congregation, and triumphantly led the black congregants out of the church (Allen 1880, 14-5). It was after this incident that Allen not only had increased support from black Philadelphians, but was also able to gain the notice of white abolitionists to support his cause (Allen 1880, 15). For the construction of his church, for example, Allen had sought subscription papers from Benjamin Rush and Robert Ralston, both members of the PAS. Allen noted that he was received warmly by the two white abolitionists, who not only provided him with the subscription papers for Bethel, but also offered him general advice. Ralston was appointed treasurer of Bethel, and Allen noted that Rush – since he did much to promote Bethel and the need for a separate black place of worship – was integral to Bethel's success (Allen 1880, 15).

The PAS saw a similar need to provide the free black community with an education as Allen did. In 1790, members of the PAS' Committee for Improving the Condition of Free Blacks gave an address to the PAS and the public, in general, to discuss the socioeconomic status of free blacks and to develop subcommittees designed to tackle different possible sources of socioeconomic disparity; the subcommittees were: the Committees of Inspection, Guardians, Education, and Employ (Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1800, 3-6). The Committee of Education was not only responsible for managing a register of all marriages and births within the free black community, but also creating a plan to increase the average level of education among free black Philadelphians (Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1789). This was not an easy task, however. In their address to the PAS and public in 1790, they noted:

> Much pains and expense have been bestowed by the Committee, and by many charitable persons, on their education. They have been taught reading, writing, and the common rules of arithmetic. But they labour under peculiar disadvantages – Their parents are obliged to bind them out when young, and there remain great difficulties in finding schools for those whose parents or masters could afford to give them a proper education (Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1800, 6).

Black children needed to work to assist in supporting the family or were bound out in hopes that they would learn a skilled trade and the rudiments of literacy during their indenture. As such, they were often unable to attend the school on a regular basis, if at all. As a result, the PAS' original plan of setting up schools for black children and expecting them to work lacked a crucial understanding of the economic strains many black families were under.

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as this was the date named by Allen himself. A more recent study by Milton Sernett of Syracuse University argues that the incident more likely occurred in 1792 or 1793, as the plans to build an upper balcony to segregate the congregation were not even in place until 1792. See Newman (2008, 65) for an overview of this debate.

## 3. A Begin to Free Black Schooling

The Committee of Education, despite being responsible for what the Committee for Improving the Condition of Free Blacks deemed to be one of the most important goals – the education of free blacks –, was slow to begin implementing any change. From mid- to late-1790, the Committee of Education reported at most meetings that it was still developing a strategy for opening a school for free black children, and that it expected that it would need a significant amount of money to not only open a school, but pay for a teacher's salary in addition to purchasing other supplies such as firewood (Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1797-1803, 6, 11). In regard to adult education, by March 1791, the Committee of Education reported that they had procured rooms for two evening schools to be attended by adults, whereby the number of men attending the schools ended up greatly outnumbering that of the women. The Committee noted that "a number of young men" were responsible for teaching reading, writing, and spelling to both men and women, with men also being taught basic arithmetic (Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1797-1803, 26). However, despite still having the priority to open a day school for children, the want of funds made it impossible for years. Nevertheless, although the Committee of Education noted that they found these adult evening schools to be important, their focus remained on first opening, and then managing children's schools. Interestingly, however, was that once the first school for children was opened by the Committee of Education, adult schools were no longer a priority in the minutes of the committee, relegated to an occasional mention every so often (Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1790-1803).

Eventually, in 1793, the Committee of Education opened its first school for black children on Cherry Street, with Eleanor Harris, a free black woman, as the teacher (Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1790-1803, 61; Bacon 2005, 22). School enrollment was generally low, owing to the fact that children were often unable to attend school during the day, as they were either working to help support their family, or were indentured and unable to attend a formal school (see Dunbar 2008; Nash 1988; Newman 2008). Nevertheless, members from the Committee regularly visited the school to check upon the progress of the "small scholars." In 1795, after deeming the school in Cherry Street to be largely successful and useful in promoting the formal education and literacy of free black children, the Committee decided to open another school in neighboring Northern Liberties, at that time a suburb of Philadelphia, with Amos White, a free black man, as teacher (Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1970-1803, 90). The other school that the Committee of Education was responsible for financing was Absalom Jones' school, which came under financial control of the Committee after Jones approached them for $100 in 1798 (Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1970-1803, 182). Marie Lindhorst has noted that one of the reasons Jones' school was found to be necessary and funded by the PAS was that

the Quaker school in Willing's Alley, opened in 1789, served to educate adults in the evenings and on Sundays. Jones' school was seen as a welcome addition to the Willing's Alley School to instruct children not yet old or advanced enough to attend the former (Lindhorst 1995, 24).

Over the years from 1793 to 1799, the Committee of Education mentioned in its meetings with the Committee for Improving the Condition of Free Blacks that members from the Committee of Education were continually pleased with the progress and abilities of the "small scholars." However, almost two years following the death of Eleanor Harris (she had been replaced by Anne Williams in early 1798) (Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1970-1803, 163), the attitude of the Committee of Education suddenly changed in their reporting of the progress of the black schools to the Committee for Improving the Condition of Free Blacks, stating that the children's progress and abilities were no longer adequate given the funds the PAS provided to the schools (Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1970-1803, 201). They noted that the teacher at the Cherry Street School, though literate, was not qualified to teach anything other than reading (Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1970-1803, 202). In their report from New Year's Eve 1799, the Committee of Education stated:

> We the Committee appointed to the care of Cherry Street School report – that we have since last meeting visited the school & find that it consists of about twenty scholars, mostly small & but few of them farther advanced in learning than spelling, and the mistress is not qualified to teach any farther than reading, we apprehend that the money expended on that school of the address that are in part supported by the Society, might be, under a better qualified Teacher more usefully applied for the benefit of the Black People (Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1970-1803, 201-2).

Upon visiting Amos White of the Northern Liberties school, the Committee found that, despite being a "well meaning man," White was not, in the Committee's opinion, at all qualified to take on the enormous task of teaching the young children (Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1970-1803, 211). They stated in the same report on December 31, 1799 that, though a few students were already able to read the Testament, most students could barely write at all, with many of them still working on being able to spell words of two or three syllables, a few with four, and barely any students five (Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1970-1803, 201). The PAS was:

> therefore much opposed to appointing people of color in the present stage of their improvement, to the important trust of Educating their youth. Reference to the [case of the Northern Liberties School] will, we conceive, show that [...] the children under the care of Amos White have been much neglected & may add that during our attendance to his going through the exercises of his school, we discovered the most glaring deficiency in his literary qualifications (Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1970-1803, 201).

When the Visiting Committee of the Committee of Education continued on to Jones' preschool, they found that, in contrast to the schools on Cherry and in

Northern Liberties, the students were orderly, advancing in their abilities – albeit more slowly than the Committee of Education preferred –, and that Jones seemed to be well-liked amongst his students, putting much effort into his teaching duties. Jones himself noted that the children were quick learners, with the newest pupils in the school learning their letters within three months (Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1970-1803, 203). Jones' only worry was that a number of pupils were unable to afford their school fees. Despite the positive impression Jones' students and the female teacher hired on to teach the girls made to the Committee, the Committee for Improving the Condition of Free Blacks decided that free blacks, at that point in their "stage of improvement" were not yet able to take on the duties of teaching their own.

The Committee of Education demanded the closing of all three schools as soon as possible, which occurred within the span of a few months. Despite the fact the Committee did not yet have the required funds to procure properties and hire schoolteachers to teach at new schools, it was steadfast in its opinion that the schools run by black teachers were harming the pupils; it was therefore better, in the eyes of the Committee, to close down the schools first, and leave the children without any access to a formal primary education until white schoolteachers and new buildings could be found (Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1970-1803, 211). Upon announcing to the Committee for Improving the Condition of the Free Blacks that all three schools would be closed, the Committee of Education had few plans for the future of the schools, except to say it would no longer consider the applications of black schoolteachers, and that it hoped that placing a school closer to the center of the city would encourage attendance amongst children who could then better manage traveling between school, home, and work (Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1970-1803, 211-49).

While the PAS placed significant emphasis on its teachers being able to read and write well, it is most interesting to note that, of the founding sixteen trustees of Bethel Church, less than a quarter were able to "read or write intelligently" (Tanner 1867, 32). Benjamin Tanner, who wrote on the AME Church in the late 1800s, was quick to mention, however, that the trustees' lack of education was not something to be lamented, but rather celebrated. He likened the trustees to the apostles, saying: "Unlike the men who usually lead off in forming new Church organizations, there was not a schoolman among them, even as there were none among the Apostles" (Tanner 1867, 32). As was stated in the Doctrines and Disciplines of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1817,

> HOLY Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation (African Methodist Episcopal Church 1817, 13).

Tanner went on to stress that it was the fact barely any of the trustees could read or write well that was an integral part of shaping the church to become

what it was – one that was not pretentious – as Absalom Jones' St. Thomas' Episcopal Church was often accused of being (Newman 2008, 72) – but rather was accepting of all black Philadelphians, regardless of educational attainment or socioeconomic status. Tanner maintained that the lack of formal education among the majority meant that their commitment to morality more than compensated for this lack; being thus not egotistical in their abilities, they were less likely to be willing to "cast aside the most revered doctrines and rites" (Tanner 1867, 32). Access to a straightforward, yet enlightening gospel was one of the reasons Allen chose Methodism for his church in the first place. He had said:

> I was confident that there was no religious sect or denomination which would suit the capacity of the colored people, so well as the Methodist, for the plain, simple gospel suits best for any people, for the unlearned can understand, and the learned are sure to understand; and the reason why the Methodists are so successful in the awakening and the conversion of the colored people, is the plain doctrine which they preach, and having a good discipline (quoted in Tanner 1867, 6).

In his study of the AME Church, George Singleton notes that Richard Allen's personal disposition was crucial for his interest in and approach to black education. He notes Allen's partaking in the development of mutual aid societies, the co-founding of the beneficial Free African Society (FAS), and being an early proponent of both night and Sunday day schools (Singleton 1952, 80-1). Born a slave, Allen did not have access to a formal education, and after purchasing his freedom, he worked multiple jobs – first hauling wood, then working in a brickyard, and finally becoming a master chimney sweep with apprentices – in order to save enough money to build Bethel (Singleton 1952, 112; Newman 2008, ch. 1). Although Allen believed that members of his congregation should be given an education – particularly a moral and religious one – in order to achieve their full potential in society, he also expected them to work tirelessly and avoid the immoral vices of drinking, gambling, swearing, and idleness. Only through this combination would free blacks put their education be put to good use.

The importance of a basic religious education also providing the rudiments of literacy was one made important early on in Bethel's history. In early 1796, two years after Bethel's inauguration, the trustees of the newly formed church met to discuss the possibility of opening a day school for children. The First Day School was held in Bethel's meeting house, and for a while boasted of having sixty pupils until the death of the teacher, Thomas Miller. By October 26th of that year, when the trustees once again met, Richard Allen stressed that the school was under no reason to be closed as long as it "may be found convenient or agreeable" (Trustees of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 1884 [1796], 143). At the same meeting in October, the trustees also unanimously voted to open a night school for adults, either as a First or Second Day School, to commence in November of 1796. The only specific rule for admit-

tance, as decided upon by the trustees, was that no disorderly student be permitted to attend, and should behavior turn disorderly, that the student in question be no longer permitted to continue (Trustees of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 1884 [1796], 143). In a brief note from the trustees following the opening of the night school, the trustees recorded that the school was "kept very orderly, the scholars behaving in a becoming manner, and their improvement beyond the teacher's expectation, their intellects appearing in every branch of learning to be equal to those of the fairest complexion" (Trustees of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 1884 [n.d.], 144).

In his general history of the AME Church, both in Philadelphia and elsewhere, AME Bishop Daniel Payne lamented that – Sunday Schools, though growing in popularity starting in the mid- to late-1810s–, by the mid-1820s, a proper Sunday School department was still non-existent in AME churches. Payne cited the combined "absence of any efforts for literary improvement among the ministers, and the want of any means of education among the rising generation" for creating a source of tension (Payne 1891, 53). He noted, however, that the lack of Sunday Schools was not a result of apathy on the part of the congregants of the AME churches, but rather a difficult situation in which the ministers, largely coming from very modest means, did not have the opportunity to obtain a formal education in their youth. Since ministers "had to earn a living by the labor of their hands," many simply never had the time to "advance far in the paths of literary acquirements," though some did improve over time (Payne 1891, 53). These ministers, according to Payne, often did not feel qualified to take on the direct formal education of their congregations.

The lack of Sunday Schools at Bethel, as Benjamin Tanner points out, was restricted to the early years of the church. By the 1850s, when Rev. William Catto from the African Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia wrote of the AME Church, he noted that Bethel had a Sabbath school "containing 350 children, two superintendents, and 25 teachers, 11 males, 14 females" (quoted in Tanner 1867, 42). What is apparent here is that, although it took decades for the educational program at Bethel to grow from night schools for adults and day schools for children to being a center for black religious education in Philadelphia, this transition took place, with growth continuing when financially feasible (DuBois 1938, 126). As such, in contrast to the situation with the PAS, where the Committee of Education quickly built up schools in a matter of years, only to have them either close when attendance fell, or when they felt teachers were not doing an adequate job, Bethel focused on the long-term growth of providing educational opportunities for both young and older free blacks.

Although schools within Bethel's walls were only focused on religious instruction and the learning of basic skills such as rudimentary literacy and, possibly, arithmetic, Richard Allen set his sights higher for his congregation. As previously mentioned, Allen's congregation was filled with more blacks from poorer families than the congregation of, for example, Absalom Jones. As such,

it was important to Allen to always have preached in his church the importance of morality, sobriety, and piety, and – in the best case – the learning of a mechanical trade that would permit members of his congregation to enjoy a steady income (American Society of Free Persons of Colour 1831; Newman 2007, 120). Allen himself did his part to demonstrate the benefits of learning a trade not only through his experiences as a master chimney sweep, but also through his taking on of apprentices for his business. For the business Allen started in 1789 –, he gained a solid reputation for his work by being willing to take on the highest, and thus most dangerous, chimneys – he often took on indentured servants in order to teach them the rewards associated with hard work and pious, moral living himself (Newman 2008, 55-8).

The emphasis on morality and religious education went beyond what Allen preached and taught in his direct sphere – he also made sure Bethel was, in general, a meeting place for such discussions. In an address to the Augustine Society – a society promoting higher education among free blacks beyond the rudiments of literacy and arithmetic –, for example, Prince Saunders called on parents to be responsible for ensuring their children received an education not only for religious purposes, but so that they would also avoid immoral vices in the future:

> [L]et it be the unceasing labour, the undeviating and the inflexibly firm purpose of the members of this Association, individually and collectively, to inspire all within the sphere of their influence, with a sense of the value and importance of giving their children a good education. Hear the words of revelation, calling upon you who profess to be Christians, to 'train up your children in the way they should go,' and to 'bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.' And if you believe this high authority, how can you be excused, if you neglect to give them the means of acquiring a knowledge of their duty to that divine instructor who came to call them to glory, to virtue, and to immorality (Saunders 2001 [1818], 83).

It was through this combination of acquiring the rudiments of literacy and the learning of a mechanical trade, if possible, combined with an emphasis on morality, Allen believed, which would lift his congregation out of poverty. Allen concentrated on exhortations in a form familiar to members of the congregation, reading out of the Testament for members not able to read. Allen stressed that it was not necessary – even if desirable – to have a formal education to be an upstanding member of society, contributing to the common good. Such an approach was crucial to Allen – to focus first on one's moral and religious training, and the ability to perform a practical trade if possible. This message was also disseminated by Allen and other black leaders outside of the church. The Free African Society, for example, also worked to uplift the moral character of black Philadelphians (Harris 1979). That, combined with an ongoing effort to learn to read, write, and cipher, would provide a strong foundation for black Philadelphians to elevate themselves out of poverty, while proving themselves at the same time to be worthy of positive white attention. Hans A.

Baer notes in his study on black mainstream churches (of which the black Methodist Church is considered part) that it was not just the responsibility of the congregation to (at least try to) adopt the strict moral code preached by the clergy. Rather, there was significant pressure on the clergy members themselves to embody these traits in order to set a positive example that the congregation could see as a positive moral influence. Allen, argues Baer, was the embodiment of these strict moral codes themselves, and despite having the impression of being "unlearned" according to some due to his lack of formal education, set an impressive example of what hard work and morality could do not only for one's self, but the community as a whole (Baer 1988, 166).

Though Allen was welcoming of all blacks from the community, it was the congregants of the burgeoning middle class, those who could perform a mechanical trade and, possibly, were literate, who were the ones who helped propel the educational system at Bethel. The PAS census data from 1838 show that a number of Bethelites were waiters, caterers, cooks, porters, and clothes sellers, all of whom were able to offer enough at Sunday services to help contribute to the flow of funds Bethel took each third Sabbath of the month which was dedicated to growing the Sunday school program (Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1838). There are a number of reasons that this burgeoning middle-class community began forming around the turn of the century. For one, the influx of blacks into Philadelphia – either manumitted or runaway slaves, or free blacks from other areas – led to an increase in hostility from white Philadelphians. Between 1790 and 1815, when the city also saw a dramatic increase in white immigrants from Europe (Germany and Ireland mostly), black Philadelphians saw themselves shut out of the burgeoning industrial sector as the European immigrants and city-born poor whites began to take over those positions. As a result, black Philadelphians began working in areas as common laborers where their labor was most desired in increasing numbers: "loading ships, digging wells, graves, and house foundations, and toiling as sawyers, sweepers, porters, ashmen, chimney sweeps, and bootblacks," while women found their most secure income washing clothes for the wealthiest residents (Nash 1988, 146). Allen himself set an example for his congregation by becoming a master chimney sweep after securing his freedom, setting the example of self-employment being a preferable way to secure one's own income in a way that shielded the worker from the ebbs and flows of white hostility that often created frequent periods of unemployment for laborers (Nash 1988, 148; Lapansky 1984, 12). Once again, Allen was demonstrating to his congregation – with examples supporting his views to be seen amongst fellow congregants – that industriousness, piety, and a willingness to learn would equate to the eventual uplift of the black community.

## 4. Black Autonomy over their own Schools

The treatment of the schoolteachers by the Committee of Education was troubling, particularly near the end of the eighteenth century. Throughout the meeting minutes of the Committee itself, and the loose correspondence kept by the Visiting Committee charting the progress of the children, in particular, most of the reports state that, though advancing slowly due to irregular attendance, the children at the Cherry Street, Northern Liberties, and Jones' schools continued to progress. The Visiting Committees repeatedly noted that attendance was a problem owing to the fact that the children had economic reasons for not being able to attend school every day, but from the early 1790s on, the Visiting Committee portrayed this as a regrettable, yet unavoidable problem. That being said, despite the fact the PAS repeatedly acknowledged that indenture agreements and work made regular attendance an impossibility for many children, they also placed the blame on those same children for not being dedicated enough to their education (Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1813-1864).

By May of 1800, the Committee of Education had found a schoolroom to rent on Sixth Street, and a white teacher, John Hutton, to teach at the school. As this school was only for boys, after much discussion and a long search for funding, a girls' school was opened in Grey's Alley the next year in 1801 (Lindhorst 1995, 26; Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1790-1803, 249; Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1797-1803). The girls' school remained open until 1806, while the boys' closed in 1804. Marie Lindhorst mentions that, by this point, the Committee of Education became more and more frustrated with the fact that the masters of indentured children were usually not willing to release the children from work to attend school. It was this lack of or sparse attendance, the Committee of Education believed, that hampered children's advancement in their studies, and left the schools opened by the PAS financially unsustainable (Lindhorst 1995, 26).

In the years immediately following the Committee of Education's decision to pull their support from the black-run schools, not all black children immediately switched to the PAS-run schools with white teachers. On the contrary, Anne Williams, Amos White, and Absalom Jones continued their schools, and the Committee of Education authorized a quarter salary to black activist Cyrus Bustill to continue running a school for children in his home in Northern Liberties despite the fact they saw no possible success or future for the school (Lindhorst 1995, 27). Black dedication to supporting, running, and maintaining schools, whether or not they received financial or other assistance from white abolitionists, remained a common thread throughout early national Philadelphia and beyond. Although the PAS fashioned itself as the absolute authority in the best course of conduct for the education of free blacks, for children in particular, the fact that blacks sought assistance from the group, but also went ahead with their educational plans without financial or administrative assistance is

telling. To many of the black members of the middle and upper classes who were schoolteachers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, what was most important was that education for their black counterparts was essential and accessible. Blacks saw necessity of members in their community to obtain at least basic literacy, moral skills, and, when possible, practical skills as transcending the desire to fund a financially profitable place of education.

The unwillingness of the PAS to continue supporting the black-run schools was an important step toward black autonomy over black schools. Although White's school, for example, ceased operations after a few years, the shift from receiving primary funding from the abolitionist society to self-funding set a precedent for future schools opened by free blacks. This does not mean, of course, that black teachers and administrators of black schools did not seek or were not offered financial assistance from the PAS. As previously mentioned, Cyrus Bustill, for example, continued receiving a partial salary for a school the PAS considered doomed. There were also other teachers who willingly took on the financial assistance in return for abolitionists being responsible for a school's administration. A notable example of this is Sarah Mapps Douglass' school, which she had continued on from the beginnings of the school founded by her mother, Grace Douglass, and family friend, James Forten. Interestingly, Grace Douglass and Forten had founded the school as an alternative way of educating their children; since both families were members of the black elite, they found the schools available to be too rudimentary in their offerings, yet found their children unable to attend schools with middle- or upper-class whites. Sarah Douglass handed over administration rights to the interracial Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (where she was also a member) in the 1830s (Winch 2002, 116). By 1840, however, Douglass had requested to draw her school away from the Society's control, citing the reason that she felt that having the antislavery society control the school meant that she was not being true to her mother and Forten's intention of having a black institution run solely by members of the black community. She did, however, continue to receive an unrequested stipend by the society in the years following (Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society 1841, 7-8; Lindhorst 1995; Winch 2002, 116). Nevertheless, black Philadelphians seemed to increasingly take on the approach of tackling questions of black education without the assistance of abolitionists; they were aware what moral, religious, and practical training was required of the black population in Philadelphia, and they were determined to provide it on their own (Saunders 2001 [1818], 83).

## 5. Conclusion

The PAS and Richard Allen's AME Bethel Church took different approaches to educating free blacks in early national Philadelphia. Important to both, how-

ever, was the belief that an education – rudimentary and practical, at least – was integral to the growing free black population in Philadelphia lifting itself out of poverty and gaining respect from white Philadelphians. The PAS and Bethel differed, however, in their approaches to learning, which caused significant differences in both the successes and failures of the two groups in achieving their aim. Morality, for example, was a prerequisite – albeit not enforced – in the schools operated and funded by the PAS. For Bethel, a strict moral code was enforced among adults, and morality was an important part of the Sunday and day schools for children in order to prepare them for a lifetime of hard work and an avoidance of vices such as drinking and gambling (Baer 1988, 166). Religiosity was a given in both situations, with the emphasis on the role of the Testament at Bethel playing a greater role in the instruction of reading and writing. There were, nevertheless, a number of differences when it came to the schools run by the PAS and Allen at Bethel.

The Committee, and later Board, of Education expected that children would attend school in clean dress, and behave orderly. Regular attendance was also expected. Although, in the case of Jones' school, it is clear that regular attendance, clean dress, and orderly behavior were not considered enough by the Committee of Education to warrant keeping a school open, these basic requisites highlighted the Committee's stress on learning reading, writing, and arithmetic (Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1790-1803). Most lamented by the Visiting Committee was the fact that attendance was poor among the children. Even though the Committee acknowledged that regular attendance was difficult for pupils due to work commitments, with their masters often not giving them the time to attend school on a regular basis, if at all, the PAS remained adamant that attendance during the day was mandatory (Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1797-1803). As a result, although out of the power of the children and the masters and/or parents who sent them to school in the first place, the PAS deemed these economic hardships to be good enough reason to close down schools in the first place when pupils were not advancing quickly enough in their skills. As such, rather than truly helping the free black children in Philadelphia advance through a more flexible approach to children's lack of time away from paid work or tasks as indentured servants, the PAS' refusal to budge meant that the children attending classes whenever they were able were the ones who ultimately suffered.

In contrast, Allen focused on a long-term, sustainable approach to the structuring of his educational offerings at Bethel. He used the funds gathered on the third Sabbath of the month to help fund schools, and spent much effort in not only ensuring formal school environments were offered to his congregants, but also that education played an almost continuous role in his sermons and those speeches given by others in his church. He saw the emphasis on moral living and a thorough understanding of the Scriptures to be the building blocks of an adequate education. Attendance was also required from students at Bethel. The

difference to the PAS, however, was in the original design of the school schedules in the first place. Allen made sure that his classes, particularly in the early years of the church, were offered on Sundays, when members of his congregation would not be required to work. He ensured that the classes did not conflict with the timing of the Sunday service or other meetings, so that everyone who wanted would be able to attend (Trustees of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 1796). Allen, having reached a wealthy status solely through his own hard work over years, understood better than members of the Committee of Education that it was, indeed, important to be strict in ensuring that high standards were adhered to. However, his intimate understanding of the plights of the working poor within Philadelphia's free black population meant that he was willing to provide the opportunity for his congregants to succeed in the first place by ensuring they would have access to the education they desired.

Allen, of course, was not alone in his drive to provide an education to his congregants. As has been already discussed, members of the free black elite such as Absalom Jones and Cyrus Bustill were also interested in laboring for the poor black population in Philadelphia, providing opportunities where there were either none offered by white abolitionists, or ones that, for being too expensive, in the wrong location, or being open during unpractical hours, were unable to meet this need (Pennsylvania Abolition Society 1790-1803, 90; Lindhorst 1995, 27). Not only was this important in a practical sense, but also in a symbolic way – by taking the onus upon themselves to educate members of their community, free blacks were able to provide a tailor-made education that was both understanding of the challenges specific to black Philadelphians, as well as designed by those who had social and financial success in a white-dominated society.

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